

SEANKELLY

lovine, Julie V. "If Martians Went to Design School," *The New York Times*, May 8, 2003.

The New York Times

If Martians Went to Design School

INSIDE "Wave UFO," a space-themed interactive artwork that has just touched down in the atrium of 590 Madison Avenue, the brain-wave projections of the nerve-racked publicist to my left jitterbugged like mad. To my right, the brain waves of a visiting Japanese art critic pulsed serenely. My own beta waves blushed red -- indicating alertness or alarm -- as they too were recorded in real time by electrode receptors suctioned to my forehead and projected as images shaped like dimpled fava beans on the inner dome.



"Wave UFO" by Mariko Mori, a Japanese artist based in New York since 1992, takes interactivity where few have gone before, especially not the people who come to lunch in the bamboo-filled courtyard of the former I.B.M. Building, at 56th Street. The installation opens on Saturday. (For information, 212-980-3942.)



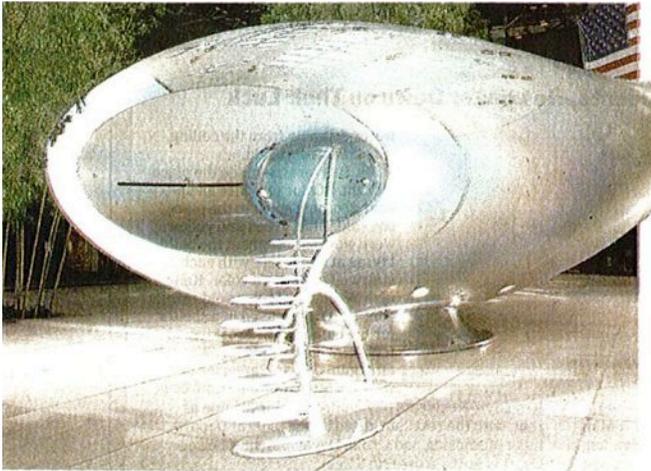
The ship has the aerodynamic profile of an overblown teardrop in a wind tunnel or a gigantic eyeball with a bulging lens for an entrance. A sweeping arc of bluish resin steps shaped like lily pads invite visitors inside for a three-minute computer-generated light show based on projections of their own brain waves, followed by a three-minute graphic animation sequence by Ms. Mori.

"We love your shiny alien," a handsomely suited middle-aged couple out of a New Yorker cartoon called out to Ms. Mori, dressed in a futuristic white-on-white kimono designed for her by Mona Kowalska of A Détacher, a Mott Street boutique.

On Monday, as she oversaw final installation details, Ms. Mori said she had aimed for a shape based on "the inside of a drop of water" and an experience of "traveling through a connected world."

It took a team of engineers, composers, graphic designers and architects, including Marco Della Torre, who has also collaborated with Claes Oldenburg, to fabricate "Wave UFO." (Ms. Mori would not divulge the cost, but said it is insured for \$1.5 million.) The 34-by-17-foot swoop-tailed pod is sponsored by the

Public Art Fund; it will travel to other cities after it closes in New York on July 31. It had its debut in February inside Peter Zumthor's translucent Kunsthaus Bregenz in Austria, where, Ms. Mori said, it attracted 10,000 visitors over six weeks.



Ms. Mori said she wanted to explore interconnectivity among humans, animals and even other worlds. The piece also engages many of the issues now under intense development in the design world: computer-aided interactivity and materials borrowed from the realm of advanced technology. The fiberglass shell was made by an Italian company, Modelleria Angelino, known for casting the bodies of Lamborghinis. The iridescent finish that gives "Wave UFO" its otherworldly sheen was originally developed for the holographic coating on euro bills. Inside, it's snug enough for three people to recline on seats -- more like chaises -- made of Technogel. Visitors exchange their shoes for

white footsies and wear electrode receptors plugged into a central computer programmed to translate brain waves into dancing images.

Should the three people seated inside achieve perfect mental harmony, according to a brochure, part of the brain waves projected overhead will form a perfect ring. Fat chance in New York.

Lying inside the enclosed pod, you feel both comforted and a little woozy. The dome is high enough to reassure claustrophobes, but the lily-pad steps leading to the entrance appear so fragile as to suggest that the project is but lightly tethered to earthly matter.



"Mori often picks up on the seemingly strange details taken from Japanese society and culture and exaggerates them through role-playing," said Masamichi Udagawa of Antenna Design, a New York firm that used similar biofeedback technology to create "Cherry Blossoms," a light column with a flower pattern triggered by movement, on the staircase at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum as part of its design triennial.

To spread the word, and to raise money for future interactive works, the Public Art Fund is selling a limited edition of 33 miniaturized

"Wave UFO's" made of Lucite for \$1,500 (www.publicartfund.org).

Fantasy and the sherbety-toned side of pop culture infused with Buddhist mythologies and rituals flavored much of Ms. Mori's earlier works, which have included the "Dream Temple," an iridescent glass shrine-for-one at the Prada Foundation gallery in Milan. A 1999 show at the Brooklyn Museum of Art included a portrait of Ms. Mori dressed in plastic samurai armor and a turquoise Barbie wig, and a 3-D video called "Nirvana" starring herself as a goddess accompanied by a band of cartoon musicians.

Ms. Mori has not installed herself in her latest works. A companion piece to "Wave UFO" at Deitch Projects, 18 Wooster Street, will also open to the public on Saturday. Six Technogel figures resembling Teletubbies will stand in a circle; when hugged, their eyes light up, their hearts pound and their feet glow. "Aliens are metaphors for outsiders," Ms. Mori said. "It is important sometimes to remove ourselves in order to really observe the world." And with luck those electrode wires won't get in the way.

Photos: DO DROP IN -- At the former I.B.M. Building in Midtown, top, visitors are invited to board an artwork by Mariko Mori, inset. Part of the interactive work includes lying down to watch a sequence of digitized patterns collected by a computer from visitors' own brain waves. (Photographs by Tom Powell; inset top, David Sims; left, Red Saunders)